



555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20001  
PHONE: 202.737.5900 • [www.aaup.org](http://www.aaup.org)

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

August 12, 2024

Dr. Marcus L. Thompson  
President  
Jackson State University  
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear President Thompson:

Dr. Dawn McLin, a tenured professor in the Department of Psychology and chair of the faculty senate at Jackson State University, has sought the advice and assistance of the American Association of University Professors as a result of an August 1 letter from you notifying her of her suspension from her teaching duties pending the outcome of dismissal proceedings. According to your letter, the dismissal action is based on a “pervasive, repetitive, and ongoing pattern of behavior,” which includes “hostile conduct, bullying, harassment, and intimidation of fellow JSU employees . . . interference in the re-accreditation process, abuse of [her] position as president of the Faculty Senate, and interference in departmental operations”—grounds that she sharply disputes.

Our interest in the case of Professor McLin arises from our Association’s longstanding commitment to basic tenets of academic freedom, tenure, and due process as enunciated in the enclosed 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, which was jointly formulated by the AAUP and the American Association of Colleges and Universities and has gained the endorsement of more than 280 scholarly societies and other higher-education organizations. Procedural standards derived from the 1940 *Statement* are set forth in the AAUP’s *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* (also enclosed). We have noted the relevant provisions of the Jackson State University faculty handbook and the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) policies and bylaws.

Regulation 5, “Dismissal Procedures,” of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations* details standards of due process designed to protect academic freedom and tenure. Under Regulation 5c(1), an administration may suspend a faculty member pending a dismissal hearing under only two conditions: (1) when “immediate harm” (which the AAUP has consistently viewed as physical in nature) to the faculty member or others “is threatened by continuance” and (2) after the administration consults with an appropriate faculty body regarding “the propriety, the length, and the other conditions of the suspension.”

We have seen no indications that Professor McLin’s continuance constitutes a threat to the safety of herself or others. Nor are we aware that this suspension was imposed following consultation with a duly constituted faculty body. We would therefore be compelled to regard the suspension as illegitimately imposed.

President Thompson

August 12, 2024

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In addition to our concerns about the apparent absence of academic due process, we have concerns about the stated basis for seeking Professor McLin's dismissal. The 1940 *Statement* refers to faculty academic freedom in the faculty's capacity as "officers" of the educational institution. In this regard, our attached report *Protecting an Independent Faculty Voice: Academic Freedom after Garcetti v. Ceballos*, further provides that "the very same expertise and institutional commitment that legitimizes the faculty's role in institutional government legitimizes its right to criticize institutional policies and actions even when that speech is not uttered in a governing forum." Consequently, according to our statement *On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom* (also attached),

Protecting academic freedom on campus requires ensuring that a particular instance of faculty speech will be subject to discipline only where that speech violates some central principle of academic morality, as, for example, where it is found to be fraudulent (academic freedom does not protect plagiarism and deceit). Protecting academic freedom also requires ensuring that faculty status turns on a faculty member's views only where the holding of those views clearly supports a judgment of competence or incompetence.

The information upon which we have based our comments has come to us primarily from Professor McLin, and we appreciate that you may have additional information that might alter our interpretation of events. If so, we would welcome your further comments. Absent such further information, we urge that the administration immediately rescind Professor McLin's suspension and restore her rights as a tenured member of the faculty.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Anita Levy, Ph.D.

Senior Program Officer

Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

Enclosures via email

cc. Mr. Bruce Martin, President, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning  
Dr. Alfred Rankins, Commissioner, State Institutions of Higher Learning  
Dr. Denise Gregory, Provost  
Professor Sophia Leggett, Vice President, Faculty Senate  
Professor Dawn McLin



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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

August 22, 2024

Dr. Marcus L. Thompson  
President  
Jackson State University  
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear President Thompson:

We have yet to receive a response to our August 12 letter concerning the case of Professor Dawn McLin. A copy of that letter is enclosed for your convenience.

The issues we raised in that letter remain of concern to us. We again urge that the administration immediately rescind Professor McLin's suspension and restore her rights as a tenured member of the faculty.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Anita Levy, Ph.D.  
Senior Program Officer  
Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

Enclosure via email

cc. Mr. Bruce Martin, President, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning  
Dr. Alfred Rankins, Commissioner, State Institutions of Higher Learning  
Dr. Denise Gregory, Provost  
Professor Sophia Leggett, Vice President, Faculty Senate  
Professor Dawn McLin



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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

January 8, 2025

Dr. Marcus L. Thompson  
President  
Jackson State University  
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear President Thompson:

It is deeply troubling that we have yet to receive a response to our two previous letters concerning the case of Professor Dawn McLin. Those letters are enclosed for your convenience. Among the concerns our letters addressed was the stated basis for seeking Professor McLin's dismissal on grounds of her alleged abuse of her position as faculty senate president. Our letter stated AAUP's longstanding position on the relationship of faculty governance to academic freedom that faculty have the legitimate right to criticize institutional policies and actions even when that speech is not uttered in a governing forum.

Professor McLin has subsequently advised the American Association of University Professors that the university's Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC) issued its findings and recommendations regarding her dismissal proceedings on November 20, 2024. We understand that the committee recommended that, the report states, "the termination process conclude and that Dr. McLin should be immediately reinstated as a full professor, with her suspension rescinded and her rights as a tenured faculty member fully restored." We also understand that, with almost two months having passed since the FPC issued its report and the semester having ended, you have yet to respond to its recommendations leaving Professor McLin in a state of professional limbo with no discernable prospect of being returned to her faculty duties and denied access to her \$1.5 million dollar grant. Under AAUP-supported principles, as set forth in Regulation 5c [16] of our *Recommended Institutional Regulations*, the administration should normally accept the faculty committee's recommendation. If the president has objections, the matter should be returned to the faculty committee with objections specified, so that the committee can reconsider its recommendation before the president renders his or her final decision. Frankly, given the academic freedom dimensions of Professor McLin's case, we find the delay in this situation extremely disturbing.

While we hold little hope of your providing us with a substantive response, we would welcome, as always, hearing of a resolution that accords with our recommended standards. This has gone on long enough.

President Thompson  
January 8, 2025  
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anita Levy".

Anita Levy, Ph.D.  
Senior Program Officer  
Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

cc. Mr. Bruce Martin, President, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher  
Learning  
Dr. Alfred Rankins, Commissioner, State Institutions of Higher Learning  
Dr. Denise Gregory, Provost  
Professor Chandar Lewis, Chair, Faculty Personnel Committee  
Professor Sophia Leggett, Vice President, Faculty Senate  
Professor Dawn McLin